

Opening Statement of Chairman Michael Bilirakis  
Subcommittee on Health and Environment and Subcommittee on  
Oversight and Investigations Hearing on the Health Effects  
of Ozone and Particulate Matter  
May 8, 1997

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I would like to welcome our audience and our witnesses today to our fourth hearing on the ozone and particulate matter standards which have been proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Today's hearing will focus on the health effects of ozone and particulate matter and the scientific information which forms the basis for EPA's proposed standards.

The EPA has stated repeatedly that the Clean Air Act requires it to set standards based on the protection of public health with an adequate margin of safety. It is the Agency's position that the Clean Air Act does not allow the cost of new regulations to be taken into consideration when setting the new standards, but that the Agency must be guided by where the science takes us.

In our first hearing on the new standards, however, we learned that there was significant difference among the members of the Clean Air Act Scientific Advisory Committee as to the level at which both standards should be set -- or even whether it was necessary to set new standards for ozone and particulate matter. Members of CASAC were clearly divided on the level of any new ozone standard and only 2 of 21 CASAC members supported the EPA's proposed level for the PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard.

At our second hearing, at which we examined the internal Administration review of proposed standards by the Office of Management and Budget and other Departments and executive offices, we learned that there was a significant difference of opinion within the Clinton Administration itself. Internal Administration documents, produced at the request of our Committee, cited numerous concerns over whether the new standards were necessary and whether the scientific evidence is sufficient to support EPA proposals.

Finally, at last week's hearing, we learned that state and local governments are also divided over the standards. While some state and local officials support the standards, others question whether we really need new standards -- or whether we should first seek to fully implement existing standards. In any event, substantial costs and regulatory burdens will be incurred at the state and local level, most likely resulting in mandatory federal funding under the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.

Today, we seek to continue our review of the standards by examining the available and diverse scientific information on health effects. We have accommodated the Minority's request for their witnesses, even at the sake of having rather large panels testify.

We have also assembled scientific and health experts from across the country. Our witnesses have arrived here from California, Washington, Georgia, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Colorado, Michigan and New York as well as more local addresses.

Our purpose today, however, remains the same. It is our duty as the committee of jurisdiction over the Clean Air Act to review the implementation activities of the Environmental Protection Agency and to determine both whether the Agency has carried out its responsibilities under the Act in a proper fashion and whether the Act itself is working well or whether provisions may have become unworkable or outdated.

I am certain that today's hearing will help better inform our decisions regarding the proposed regulations on ozone and particulate matter. I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses and a productive question and answer session for both panels.